

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

MEMORIAL MEETING

FEBRUARY 12 1908

1908

Brevet Lieut.-Colonel John P. Nicholson
Recorder, Compiler

Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania

FEBRUARY 12, 1908

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 4, 1861, TO APRIL 15, 1865

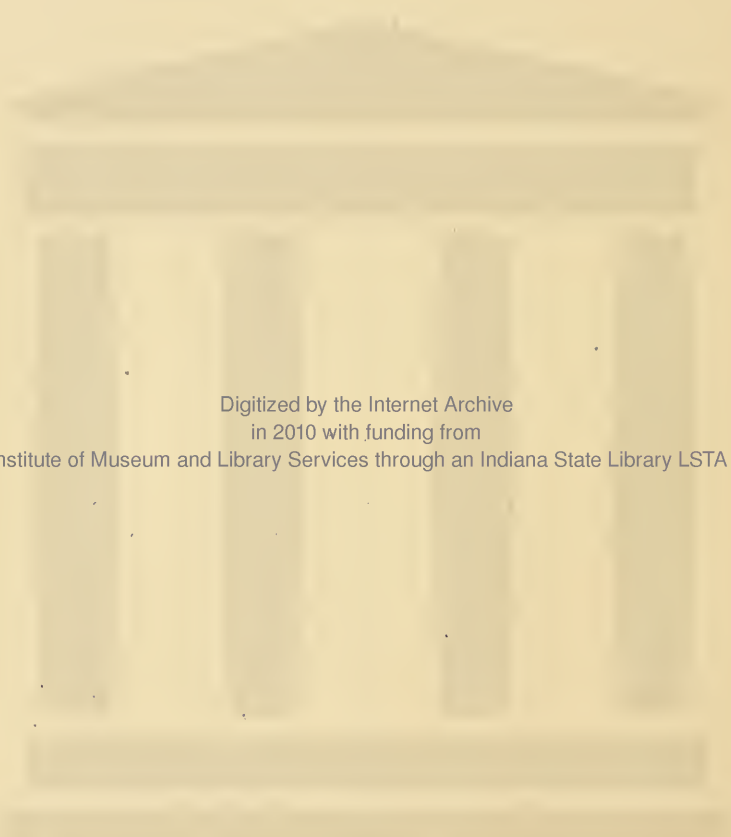
Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin (LaRue) Co., Kentucky
Assassinated April 14, 1865 ; died April 15, 1865, at Washington, D. C.
Enrolled by Special Resolution April 16, 1865.

"My Personal Recollections of President Abraham Lincoln"

COMPANION MAJOR-GENERAL GRENVILLE M. DODGE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION
OF THE UNITED STATES

"Lincoln was an extraordinary man. He triumphed over the adverse conditions of his early years because Nature had bestowed on him high and rare powers. Superficial observers who saw his homely aspect and plain manners, and noted that his fellow townsmen, when asked why they so trusted him, answered that it was for his common sense, failed to see that his common sense was a part of his genius. What is common sense but the power of seeing the fundamentals of any practical question and of disengaging them from the accidental and transient features that may overlie these fundamentals—the power, to use a familiar expression, of getting down to bed rock? One part of this power is the faculty for perceiving what the average man will think and can be induced to do. This is what keeps the superior mind in touch with the ordinary mind, and this is perhaps why the name of "common sense" is used, because the superior mind seems in its power of comprehending others to be itself a part of the general sense of the community. All men of high practical capacity have this power. It is the first condition of success. But in men who have received a philosophical or literary education there is a tendency to embellish, for purposes of persuasion, or perhaps for their own gratification, the language in which they recommend their conclusions, or to state those conclusions in the light of large general principles, a tendency which may, unless carefully watched, carry them too high above the heads of the crowd. Lincoln, never having had such an education, spoke to the people as one of themselves."



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PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

MR. COMMANDER AND COMPANIONS:—I first met Abraham Lincoln in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1859. I had been making a reconnoissance west of the Missouri River, and on my return to Council Bluffs stopped at the Pacific Hotel. After dinner Mr. Lincoln sought me out and engaged me in conversation about what I knew of the country west of the Missouri River, and greatly impressed me by the great interest he displayed in the work in which I was engaged, and he stated that there was nothing more important before the nation at that time than the building of a railroad to the Pacific coast. He ingeniously extracted a great deal of information from me, and I found the secrets I was holding for my employers in the East had been given to him. He had just closed his great debate with Douglas, and having bought some property in Council Bluffs, Iowa, had taken a vacation and rest by crossing the State of Missouri by rail, and had come to Council Bluffs by boat on the Missouri river to look at his property and the future prospects of that town.

The same day he addressed a large gathering of citizens of the town and surrounding country in the public square. Among others I listened to his speech, which was very able, attractive and convincing. His method of presenting his argument was very simple, and so well-defined that it was easy for anyone to comprehend it. It was his convincing methods that made him so attractive as a public speaker. I know that I left the crowd absolutely convinced that what he had said was true, and his policy on the negro question in national affairs should be adopted.

My second interview with him was in 1863. While in command at Corinth I received an order from General Grant to report to the President in Washington. As no explanation came with the order it alarmed me, as I had been arming some negroes to guard a contraband camp. In the expedition of my forces from Corinth into the heart of Mississippi, and up the valley of the Tennessee, there had followed our troops several thousand negroes without means of support. I had established a contraband camp outside of Corinth under Chaplain Alexander, and started a system of locating these negroes on abandoned plantations. I had guarded the camp with my own troops, but at that time there was objection on the part of the troops to guarding negroes,

GRENVILLE MELLEN DODGE.

Colonel 4th Iowa Infantry July 6, 1861; discharged to accept promotion April 30, 1862.

Brig.-General U. S. Volunteers March 21, 1862; Major-General June 7, 1864; resigned and honorably discharged May 30, 1866.

and several times unruly negroes had been shot at. Chaplain Alexander came to me one day and said if I would furnish him arms he would organize two companies of negroes to guard the camps, and I could detail some non-commissioned officers he knew of to act as officers of the companies. I thought this a good solution of our troubles and furnished the arms and details. This caused adverse comment and criticism, because I had no authority under the regulations for such action, and when I received this order from General Grant I was very much alarmed, and thought I was to be called to account for this action, but when I reached Washington and reported to the President I found that he had not forgotten our conversation on the Pacific Hotel steps, and had called me to consult as to the proper place for the initial point of the Union Pacific Railway, which under the law of 1862 he was to select. There was great competition from all the towns on both sides of the Missouri River for fifty miles above and below Council Bluffs, Iowa, for this initial point. I found Mr. Lincoln well posted in all the controlling reasons covering such a selection, and we went into the matter and discussed all the arguments presented by the different localities on the Missouri River. I detailed to him as fully as I could without my maps or data where, from an engineering and commercial point of view, the Union Pacific Railway should make its starting point on the Western boundary of Iowa. The physical conditions of the road both east and west of the Missouri River controlled this selection, and he finally located it where I suggested at Council Bluffs, Iowa, by two orders. The first not being sufficiently definite was supplemented by a second some months later, which reads as follows :

“EXECUTIVE MANSION,

Washington, November 17, 1863.

In pursuance of the fourteenth section of the Act of Congress, entitled ‘An Act to aid in the construction of a Railroad and Telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, and to secure to the Government the use of the same for postal, military and other purposes,’ approved July 1, 1862, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby fix so much of the western boundary of the State of Iowa as lies between the north and south boundaries of the United States Township, within which the City of Omaha is situated, as the point from which the line of railroad and telegraph in that section shall be constructed.

(Signed) ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”

After this discussion of the location, he took up with me the question of building the road. The law of 1862 had failed to bring any capital or parties to undertake the work, and I said to him that in my opinion private enterprise could not build the road. Mr. Lincoln said the Government had its hands full and could not undertake the work, but were ready to support any company to its fullest legal extent, and amend the law so as to enable them to issue securities that would furnish the necessary funds. On leaving Mr. Lincoln, and bidding him good-bye, I never for one moment have forgotten his cordiality and the things he said to me. I came from Washington to New York and had a session with the parties then connected with the Union Pacific Railway, John A. Dix, Henry Farnam, T. S. Durant, George Francis Train, and others, and informed them of the result of my visit and what President Lincoln had said. They were greatly encouraged and immediately went to work and prepared and presented to Congress the Union Pacific bill of 1864, which was passed,

and under which the road was built in some four years, while Congress allowed ten years for its construction, and it was the faith, energy and comprehensive grasp of Lincoln of what its building meant to the United States that induced Congress to pass liberal laws, and made it possible to raise the funds to accomplish the work.

I did not see President Lincoln again until after the Atlanta campaign. While I was convalescing from wounds received at Atlanta, General Grant invited me to visit him at City Point. It was at a time when everything around Petersburg looked blue. The desertions from our army were about equal to the enlistments, and there was a general demand that Grant should move. I spent two weeks looking at the Army of the Potomac, the finest and best equipped army I ever saw. I visited all the commands of the Armies of the James and Potomac as they surrounded Petersburg and held the north side of the James River, and became acquainted with most of its army and corps commanders. Evenings we would sit around the camp fire at City Point, and General Grant in that comprehensive and conversational way he had of describing any event, when he felt at liberty to talk freely, which is shown so plainly in his Memoirs, told me of his campaign from the Wilderness to City Point, of many of his plans that failed to materialize for various reasons that he gave. After listening several evenings to the discussion of these matters I asked General Grant very innocently and naturally who was responsible for the failure of these plans, and looking at me in that humorous way which was in his disposition he replied: "That, General, has not yet been determined."

While at City Point I visited the Army of the James, then commanded by General Butler, when he attempted to break through the enemy's lines on the north side of the James, and saw the attack and failure. I was greatly impressed as I saw the troops move up to the attack, and stand so steadily, and receive the destructive fire of the enemy without taking cover. In the West, under similar conditions, our men would have gone to cover when they saw there was no possibility of carrying the works before them, but here they seemed to wait for an order, and my anxiety for them was such that I could not help expressing my surprise that they did not either charge or cover, but they stood there taking a murderous fire until the command to retire was given. In the West while they stood there our whole line would have found shelter behind trees, or buried themselves. As I was leaving City Point General Grant suggested I should call on President Lincoln as I returned to my command in the Army of the Tennessee. General Rufus Ingalls, Chief Quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac, and Major-General Burk, of the British Army, who commanded in Canada, were on the headquarters boat that took me to Washington. When I arrived I went immediately to the White House. In the ante-room I met Senator Harlan of Iowa, who took me immediately to President Lincoln. He had a room full of callers, and asked me to sit down until he disposed of the waiting crowd. I sat there and watched President Lincoln dispose of one after another, always in a kindly way. After waiting a long time I felt that, perhaps, he had disposed of me in the same way he had the others, and I took occasion to say to him that I had only called to pay my respects, and unless he desired me to wait longer, I would bid him good-bye. He immediately asked me to wait, saying he desired to see me if I had the time to spare. After the crowd had gone the doors were closed.

President Lincoln saw I was ill at ease, not knowing what I was there for or what to say, but he sat me down near his desk, and crossing his legs, took down a small book ; I think it was called the " Gospel of Peace ;" anyhow, it was very humorous, and as he read some extracts from it he soon had me laughing and at my ease.

He was called to lunch and took me with him ; and then he continued the same methods he did the first time I saw him, and extracted from me all I had seen on my visit to General Grant and the Army of the Potomac, got my views, and finally drew me out until he had obtained from me an answer something like this : " You know, Mr. President, we in the West have no doubts about Grant, and, if he is given time, I have no doubt he will soon whip Lee's Army. When, or how, I confess I cannot see, but that he will I have no doubt whatever." As I said this we were leaving the table, and Lincoln brightened up, took my hand in his, and said, with great solemnity : " I am so glad to hear you say that." As I bade him good-bye, I asked him if there was anything I could do to repay his great kindness to me. He answered only : " If you don't object, I would like to have you take to your army, when you go, my kindest regards."

I was then too young to weigh and comprehend all that was said, but in after years, when I learned the great crisis pending, I saw how completely he took me into his power and extracted my innermost thoughts, and what a satisfaction it was to have me express that implicit faith in General Grant while so many were disseminating charges and denouncing his great battles as great destruction of life without proper compensation.

In after years I learned that Grant knew the conflict in Washington, and knew that if I had the opportunity I would give the President an unprejudiced view of what I saw and learned.

It was intended on my return that I should resume command of my corps and move with Sherman in his campaign from Atlanta to the sea, but I had not fully recovered from the wounds received at Atlanta, and Sherman did not think it prudent for me to attempt it, so I was assigned to the command at Vicksburg that was to move from there to the rear of Mobile, and in connection with General Canby capture that place, but I was stopped at Cairo and ordered to St. Louis. General Rosecrans was then in command of that Department, and General Price of the rebel army had made a campaign through the State of Missouri, overrunning it, and Mr. Lincoln and General Grant were both disappointed that Rosecrans did not stop him, as they considered he had sufficient forces to do so, and General Grant wrote President Lincoln asking him to relieve Rosecrans and assign me to the command, which was done. This command was a promotion to me, but was a disappointment. Missouri was torn with civil and political dissensions, and had given the President more trouble than any other State in the Union. It was half Union and half Rebel; brother against brother and father against son. The State was overrun with Guerrillas and partisan bands, and although then under partial Union government, nobody was satisfied with it. General Schofield had been in command before Rosecrans, and had pursued a very conservative policy along the line laid down by President Lincoln, but it was not satisfactory to either side, but Schofield had laid the basis for the final successful solving of the problem. However, the opposition from both parties was so strong that President Lincoln was

forced to relieve him, but in doing so complimented General Schofield highly upon his administration and promoted him to be a Major-General, but both parties in Missouri were strong enough to prevent his confirmation by the Senate. After the Senate adjourned Mr. Lincoln reappointed him, but his appointment hung fire in the Senate until after the battle of Chattanooga, when Grant, wishing an officer to relieve General Foster in East Tennessee, who was obliged to give up his command on account of his wounds, asked for General Schofield to take that command. As soon as President Lincoln received General Grant's dispatch he saw his opportunity and used it to induce the Senate to confirm Schofield, who went to the command of the Army of the Ohio, and commanded it with great ability and success until the end of the war. President Lincoln in sticking to and supporting Schofield showed that trait in his character that was so prominent of never dropping a friend he had confidence in, no matter how great the pressure upon him. He had sometimes, as he said, let go his hold, but spit on his hands and got a new and better one, which brought results.

I assumed command of the Department and Army of Missouri on December 2, 1864, and thus came again into direct communication with President Lincoln. There had been many dispatches sent to General Rosecrans to send all the troops he could spare to General Thomas, who was in a death struggle with Hood at Nashville. As soon as I assumed command I received a dispatch from General Halleck to send all the force I could spare to the support of Thomas, and he quoted a dispatch from General Grant to himself in which Grant requested him to telegraph me to send all the troops I could spare to General Thomas, and stated in his dispatch to me that General Grant says "with such an order you can be relied upon to send all that can properly go." I learned afterwards that that portion of the dispatch was added by Mr. Lincoln, who was greatly disturbed at General Thomas' position, and said it might induce me to make an extra effort to help Thomas out.

I looked the field over, and could see no reason why United States forces should be retained in that State, as there was no organized force of the enemy in it except Guerrillas and partisan bands, and the Missouri State Militia, some 10,000 in number, which were mustered into the United States service upon condition that they should not leave the State, I felt was ample to take care of it, so I sent to General Thomas every regiment in the State, even one that was not fully organized and mustered in, including two divisions of the 16th Corps, all under General A. J. Smith, making an independent force of about 15,000 men, which, as you know, was the force that turned Hood's left at the battle of Nashville, and started the complete defeat of his army.

While I was in command of this Department President Lincoln was often in communication with me. He had a very kindly feeling for the Union people of Missouri. He had imbibed it from the beginning when Blair and Lyon had saved the State from joining the Confederacy. I found the prisons at Alton and St. Louis filled with prisoners of war, and with persons and citizens who sympathized with the rebels. I wanted to send them through the lines to the south or north, out of the State of Missouri, whichever they thought best, and wrote to the War Department that it was cheaper to fight than to feed them, but Mr. Lincoln did not approve this. But when I had to make a campaign on the plains in the winter of 1864-65 I recommended that these prisoners

be allowed to enlist to fight Indians. I ascertained upon consulting them that they were anxious to do this if they were not asked to fight in the South. Mr. Lincoln approved this, and I emptied the prisons by organizing five regiments known as United States Volunteers, but called "Reconstructed Rebs," and later on under me they did gallant service, and endured hardships and sufferings that it is almost impossible to describe or conceive of. My escort in this campaign was a company of Pennsylvania cavalry.

Mr. Lincoln's letters to me as to the policy to be pursued in Missouri made me look carefully into the work and plans of General Schofield, and I followed them as far as practicable. I made up my mind not to take any part in the civil government, but to look carefully after the military, and issued some very drastic orders that brought down on my head protest after protest, and appeals to President Lincoln. When I explained to him that as long as I kept troops quartered in the towns that it was an invitation to all the discontented to make trouble, but when I withdrew my troops and made citizens responsible for feeding and harboring any rebel person or band without reporting it within twenty-four hours to the nearest United States post, the penalty being death, that the people of the State would make it impossible for these guerrilla bands to organize and roam over the State, he approved my action, and the result was peace and quiet in the State, and in January, 1865, I left the State to take care of itself, while with my troops I made the Indian campaign of that winter.

While in command of the Department of Missouri I daily saw what a kind heart Mr. Lincoln had, and how his sympathy went out to everyone in trouble, and his great desire to save life. The conflict in Missouri was a bitter, personal, revengeful one. I remember the day before President Lincoln's assassination a lady came to see me whose son was about to be executed for murder committed as a guerrilla. She had been to Washington to save him, and had seen the President. She brought me Mr. Lincoln's card, on the back of which he had written: "My dear General Dodge: Cannot you do something for this lady, who is in much trouble?" I understood the case; that, while he would not interfere, he hoped that I could see my way to do so, and he disposed of the lady in that way. The lady, in presenting the case, supposed that card alone would pardon her son, but when I told her I would consider it, she was indignant, and left, no doubt determined to report me to the President, and appeal over my head. That evening President Lincoln was assassinated; all officers holding important commands were notified in the night, so that they could prepare for the excitement that was bound to come. I was especially cautioned to prepare for trouble in Missouri. It was thought it would anger the Union men in the State, and cause an uprising and acts of revenge upon the rebel sympathizers. I brought into the City of St. Louis such troops as were near, and issued an order suspending all business, and warning both sides to remain in their houses, and prohibiting any gathering of crowds on the streets, but I found that the Southern people were more distressed at the great crime, if possible, than the Union side. The streets of St. Louis were deserted for two days, and there was nothing but sorrow exhibited on both sides. The lady called the next day and asked me for the card; said she desired to keep it as a memento, no doubt giving up all hope for her son; but I did not have it in my heart, after Lincoln's death, to carry out the order of the court, and therefore commuted the sentence to imprisonment.

When the remains of President Lincoln were brought to Springfield, Illinois, I repaired there with my troops and staff, and took part in the last sad rites to one who from the time I first knew him in 1859 until his death had been more than a friend to me, who all through my service in the war had not only said kind words to me, but had raised me to the highest rank and command in the army.

Notwithstanding the trials and criticisms of his career, to-day there is no person in the world with one word of fault to find, who knows of his acts. Even the London Punch, that criticised and ridiculed Mr. Lincoln during his administration, changed, and after his death said it was sorry and regretted its course, holding that it was a remarkable man who could indite in a car on a train on his trip to Gettysburg that remarkable tribute, so strong in English, so expressive, eloquent and sympathetic, and said that his Gettysburg speech had changed their whole course and opinion of Lincoln.

Lincoln's great ability, his pure administration, his kind but firm hand, has disarmed all criticism, and to-day no one names him but in words of respect and love, and his name the world over is coupled in the trinity Washington, Lincoln and Grant, the creators and saviours of the Union.

As President, "he was trying the case before the great jury of the people, absolutely confident that if he could state it to them truly as it was they would bring in the right verdict. He knew them and how to appeal to them not as a demagogue, but, as it were, the voice of their own enlightened judgment. He could quicken in them that sense of duty and of destiny which, once it possessed them, would prove itself invincible.

Trying the case thus before the jury of the people—at once trusting to them and guiding them—you see the sharp limitation put upon his actions. 'The man who must continually stand aside from his own executive acts in order to explain and to convince is rendered by so much less effective in purely executive work.' Hence the harsh criticism and vile abuse he had to bear from those who saw the weary war drag on and did not recognize, as Lincoln recognized, that his power was wholly delegated power. If he was to save the Union it could only be by arousing in the people 'that which could do the work for them and for him.'

He had his fixed purpose. He waited on events for his policy, going forward as a solitary hunter might who sought a quarry in a tangled underbrush. Such a hunter must proceed step by step, trusting for guidance as he advances. And so Mr. Lincoln—like another man not quite unknown to fame—watched the West, took his cue from it for his next move when he could find one; appealed for support to the plain people, not to the Congress or the masters of the market in New York when he was clear himself what the next move should be—knowing whence his power came and whither returned."

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